

**Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
NSSE 2005 Benchmark Summary Report
March 2006**

Kentucky Public Four-Year Universities



Introduction

Why is NSSE important to Kentucky Postsecondary Education?

Research on the impact of college on students consistently indicates that the more students are engaged in effective educational practices, both inside and outside the classroom, the more they will learn and develop during college. Thus, in order to help focus discussions about the importance of student engagement on collegiate quality and guide institutional improvement efforts, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) created five clusters or benchmarks of effective educational practice: (1) Level of academic challenge; (2) Active and collaborative learning; (3) Student-faculty interaction; (4) Enriching educational experiences', and (5) Supportive campus environment.

Using approximately 225,000 randomly selected students from 518 institutions that participated in NSSE 2005, each Kentucky public four-year institution received a "Benchmark Report" in fall 2005 that compared their students' performance with selected peer groups and the 2005 national norms. These benchmark reports provide detailed data tables that highlight whether student engagement at Kentucky's public four-year universities differs in a significant way from the average student in the respective comparison groups.

The NSSE 2005 Benchmark Summary Report provides non-technical, aggregated results from the various institutional benchmark reports. A negative sign (-) in a table indicates that students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically below students in the comparison group, a positive sign (+) indicates that students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically above students in the comparison group, and no sign indicates that students at Kentucky institutions were engaged at levels equal to the comparison group. For the comprehensive universities, the peer comparison group represents other master's granting colleges and universities and for UK and UofL, the peer group represents other major doctoral granting universities.

It is important to note that given the way NSSE generates its benchmark reports, students at both public and private colleges and universities are included in the respective peer and national comparison groups. NSSE research indicates that in general, students at private colleges and universities are more engaged than their counterparts at public institutions. Thus, in the following analysis, student engagement levels for both the peer institutions and the national norms are likely higher than they would be if students at only public institutions were included in the analysis. Consequently, where students at Kentucky institutions respond at engagement levels equal to or above the peer institutions or national norms, they are performing at levels comparable to students at both public and private institutions.

What do we hope to accomplish by Kentucky's participation in NSSE?

One of the six goals outlined in HB 1 is for Kentucky postsecondary education to deliver educational services at a quality and quantity comparable to the national average. In the 2005-2010 Public Agenda, the Council adopted NSSE as one of its institutional key indicators. NSSE provides an indirect proxy for assessing the quality of undergraduate education and a way to assess progress on whether college graduates are prepared for life and work in Kentucky. For each of the NSSE benchmarks, a brief summary analysis highlights the extent to which students at Kentucky public four-year institutions engage in effective educational practices at levels comparable to students at peer institutions and to the national average. Some concluding thoughts are also provided on the last page of the report. In the upcoming months, year-to-year comparisons will also be analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of change over time and help inform state and institution level discussions on increasing the quality of the undergraduate experience.

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance. NSSE survey items that comprise *Level of Academic Challenge* include:

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, etc. related to academic program)
- Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more, between 5 and 19 pages, and less than 5 pages
- Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory
- Work emphasizing synthesis and organizing information into new, more complex interpretations
- Work emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- Work emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
- Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work

<i>Level of Academic Challenge</i>						
	First-Year Students			Seniors		
	KY	Peer	National	KY	Peer	National
EKU						
Morehead						
Murray						
NKU		-	-		-	-
WKU		-	-		-	-
UK			-			
UofL		-	-			
Notes: For the comprehensive institutions, the peer group represents other Master's granting colleges and universities and for UK and UofL, the peer group represents other major doctoral granting universities. A negative sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) below students in the peer group. A positive sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) above students in the peer group. KSU is not listed in the table because they did not participate in NSSE 2005. KSU is registered to participate in NSSE 2006 and all Kentucky institutions are currently scheduled to participate again in NSSE 2007.						

Analysis

- According to NSSE, there is no difference in the level of academic challenge among Kentucky's public four-year institutions.
- For first-year students, four of the seven institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and three of seven perform at comparable levels to the national norms.
- For seniors, five of the seven institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and to the national norms.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily, during, and after college. NSSE survey items that comprise *Active and Collaborative Learning* include:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class

<i>Active and Collaborative Learning</i>						
First-Year Students				Seniors		
	KY	Peer	National	KY	Peer	National
EKU						
Morehead						
Murray						
NKU					-	-
WKU	+					
UK	-	-	-			
UofL	-		-	-		-
Notes: For the comprehensive institutions, the peer group represents other Master's granting colleges and universities and for UK and UofL, the peer group represents other major doctoral granting universities. A negative sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) below students in the peer group. A positive sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) above students in the peer group. KSU is not listed in the table because they did not participate in NSSE 2005. KSU is registered to participate in NSSE 2006 and all Kentucky institutions are currently scheduled to participate again in NSSE 2007.						

Analysis

- According to NSSE, first-year students at UK and UofL experience less active and collaborative learning than their counterparts at other Kentucky institutions. Whereas, first-year students at WKU experience a greater level of active and collaborative learning than students at other Kentucky institutions.
- Seniors at UofL also experience less active and collaborative learning than their counterparts at other Kentucky institutions. Research suggests that it is more difficult to engage students outside the classroom when a larger proportion of the student body commutes and is non-traditional.
- For both first-year students and seniors, six of the seven institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and five of seven perform at comparable levels to the national norms.

Student-Faculty Interaction

Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life long learning. NSSE survey items that comprise *Student-Faculty Interaction* include:

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)
- Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)
- Worked with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements

<i>Student-Faculty Interaction</i>						
First-Year Students				Seniors		
	KY	Peer	National	KY	Peer	National
EKU				+	+	
Morehead						
Murray						
NKU					-	-
WKU						
UK	-		-			
UofL						-
Notes: For the comprehensive institutions, the peer group represents other Master's granting colleges and universities and for UK and UofL, the peer group represents other major doctoral granting universities. A negative sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) below students in the peer group. A positive sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) above students in the peer group. KSU is not listed in the table because they did not participate in NSSE 2005. KSU is registered to participate in NSSE 2006 and all Kentucky institutions are currently scheduled to participate again in NSSE 2007.						

Analysis

- According to NSSE, first-year students at UK experience less student-faculty interaction than their counterparts at other Kentucky institutions. Whereas, seniors at EKU experience a greater level of student-faculty interaction than students at other Kentucky institutions.
- For first-year students, all seven of Kentucky's public four-year institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and six of seven perform at comparable levels to the national norms.
- For seniors, five of the seven institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and students at EKU perform above their peers on this benchmark.
- Seniors at five of the seven Kentucky institutions perform at comparable levels to the national norms.

Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment academic programs. Experiencing diversity teaches students valuable things about themselves and others. Technology facilitates collaboration between peers and instructors. Internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge. The NSSE survey items that comprise *Enriching Educational Experiences* include:

- Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, sports, etc.)
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework & study abroad; Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, etc.)
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment
- Campus encourages contact with students from different economic, social, or ethnic backgrounds
- Participate in a formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

<i>Enriching Educational Experiences</i>						
First-Year Students				Seniors		
	KY	Peer	National	KY	Peer	National
EKU	-	-	-			-
Morehead		-	-		-	-
Murray						
NKU			-	-	-	-
WKU			-	+		-
UK		-	-			
UofL					-	-
Notes: For the comprehensive institutions, the peer group represents other Master's granting colleges and universities and for UK and UofL, the peer group represents other major doctoral granting universities. A negative sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) below students in the peer group. A positive sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) above students in the peer group. KSU is not listed in the table because they did not participate in NSSE 2005. KSU is registered to participate in NSSE 2006 and all Kentucky institutions are currently scheduled to participate again in NSSE 2007.						

Analysis

- According to NSSE, first-year students at EKU and seniors at NKU experience less enriching activities than their counterparts at other Kentucky institutions and seniors at WKU experience more.
- For first-year students and seniors, four of the seven institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and two of seven perform at comparable levels to the national norms.
- A number of the items that comprise this benchmark, including participating in co-curricular activities, studying abroad, and internships, are linked to institutional selectivity and family income.

Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus. NSSE used the following survey items to measure the *Supportive Campus Environment*.

- Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically
- Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially
- Quality of relationships with other students
- Quality of relationships with faculty members
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

<i>Supportive Campus Environment</i>						
	First-Year Students			Seniors		
	KY	Peer	National	KY	Peer	National
EKU						
Morehead						
Murray				+	+	+
NKU						
WKU		-	-		-	-
UK			-			
UofL			-	-		-
Notes: For the comprehensive institutions, the peer group represents other Master's granting colleges and universities and for UK and UofL, the peer group represents other major doctoral granting universities. A negative sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) below students in the peer group. A positive sign indicates students at the Kentucky institution responded statistically ($p < .01$) above students in the peer group. KSU is not listed in the table because they did not participate in NSSE 2005. KSU is registered to participate in NSSE 2006 and all Kentucky institutions are currently scheduled to participate again in NSSE 2007.						

Analysis

- According to NSSE, there is no difference in students' perceptions of how supportive their campuses are among first-year students. Seniors at Murray report higher levels than their counterparts at other Kentucky institutions and seniors at UofL report lower levels of campus support.
- For first-year students, six of the seven institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and four of seven perform at comparable levels to the national norms.
- For seniors, five of the seven institutions perform at comparable levels to their peers and seniors at Murray report higher levels of support versus students at peer institutions.
- For seniors, four of seven institutions perform at comparable levels to the national norms. Murray's students respond at higher levels than the national norms, while seniors at UofL and WKU respond at lower levels.

Conclusion

In general, many students at Kentucky's public four-year institutions experience levels of engagement similar to their counterparts across the country. Of the 140 peer and national comparisons analyzed, 93 (66.4%) were equal to the comparison groups, 44 (31.4%) were below, and three (2.2%) were above the comparison groups. More favorable results were reported when Kentucky students were compared to students at their peer institutions. Approximately 77% of the comparisons were equal to or above the peer groups versus 60% compared to the national norms. However, this peer to national differential is not unexpected given the large percentage of small, private liberal arts institutions included in the national average.

There also appears to be an opportunity for representatives at Kentucky institutions to share some good practices among themselves given the positive results reported by first-year students at WKU for active and collaborative learning, seniors at ECU for student-faculty interaction, seniors at WKU for enriching educational experiences, and seniors at Murray for supportive campus environment.

Next Steps

This report is only one step in an ongoing discussion related to using student engagement and related student experience data to elevate the statewide dialogue on improving the quality of teaching and learning. In fact, two Kentucky institutions, Kentucky State University, and Western Kentucky University, were recently highlighted in NSSE's 2005 Annual Report for creative ways of incorporating student engagement information into campus improvement efforts.

As part of the Public Agenda, the Council continues to monitor student and civic engagement as institutional key indicators of performance. The Council is also working on analyses to compare Kentucky's NSSE 2005 results to our first participation in NSSE 2001. The Council is also promoting a statewide workshop in May 2006 for teams of representatives from Kentucky institutions to gather and share information with experts on best practices.